Remarks to Murdoch University Students

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"U.S. Vision for a Sustainable World"

Thank you for that kind introduction. It is always great to have the opportunity to get out of the office and talk with university students. This has been especially true since the elections in November.

I hear from my colleagues in Washington that there is a sense of renewed optimism and enthusiasm in the air across America. I experienced it myself when I returned to Washington during Prime Minister Rudd's visit to the United States in March and the subsequent visit of Foreign Minister Smith and Defense Minister Fitzgibbon in April. There is an increased interest in participating in the American political process by the American people, in particular among groups and communities who had

previously felt alienated from the mainstream. The election and inauguration of Barack Obama was not just an electrifying event it the United States; it has stirred hope and optimism around the world.

Barack Obama came to the White House representing change. This president, to so many people in the United States and around the globe, represents a renewal of the American democratic spirit.

President Obama is someone whose background reflects the diversity that makes America great. In addition to being the first African-American president, he is one of the youngest American presidents[i]. Born in 1961, at the end of the baby

boom generation, he is the first president to have come of age in the 1980s, after the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement. The atmosphere in which he grew up was markedly different from the socially tumultuous 1960s that shaped the outlook of the earlier baby boomers, such as myself.

The President and his advisers recognize that the United States and the world face great perils and urgent foreign policy challenges. These include ongoing wars and regional conflicts, the global economic crisis, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, climate change, worldwide poverty, food insecurity, and pandemic disease. How we deal with all of them will be a great challenge. But in many ways the largest

questions are the most important: What kind of world do we want to live in? What do we have to do to achieve that?

We live in an interconnected world. In this era of Facebook, Google Earth, Twitter and Sky News, nothing happens around the world hidden from our view. So we see people living in poverty. We know that people around the world face degraded environments, water shortages, and struggle with an uncertain future. We in the developed world are linked to that irrevocably. It is our good fortune to enjoy relative comfort and prosperity. But we have to be part of the solutions to these problems. So what is our vision for solving those challenges?

Most of these challenges cannot be resolved with the traditional instruments of state power, such as military force. The challenges of globalization, economic stability, and development are where we need to deploy our smartest tools. Diplomacy and development will be equally important as military or economic strength in building a peaceful, stable and prosperous world.

So back to my question – what kind of world do we want to live in?

First, we all want to live in a prosperous world. In the last 60 years, hundreds of millions of people have been raised out of poverty. This has been an inspiring development. President Obama reaffirmed our hope in his inaugural

address, when he told the world's poor that "we pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds."

His promise makes clear that our goal is to help our partners use their resources to grow and prosper. But we also want them to protect against the environmental and social consequences of runaway growth. We have seen devastating results from ignoring the impacts of our own growth. So we must target our foreign policy in ways that lead to better governance and better outcomes for people and the environment.

This is why the U.S. has been one of the strongest champions of the UN's Millennium Development Goals. Our Millennium Challenge Account has provided more than $6 billion in aid to support those goals. Environmental stewardship and good governance are key elements of the MDG agenda. They are a key qualifier for assistance compacts with us, and U.S. development assistance is a large chunk of global development spending. U.S. official development assistance (ODA) totaled $26.0 billion in calendar year 2008. This is a $4.2 billion, or 19 percent, increase from the previous year.

We know we have a duty to protect global ecosystems for future generations. Among the most crucial tests will be our response to climate change. Secretary Clinton in April told

key policymakers from around the globe that climate change is a "clear and present danger to our world that demands immediate attention." Without strong action on climate change, the worst impacts will fall on those least able to deal with them. We are committed to addressing this issue and we will act. That is why the Obama Administration is taking a leading role in pushing for a successful outcome of the UN climate negotiations later in the year in Copenhagen.

One way to do that is to build consensus to reduce emissions among key nations before Copenhagen. So we are leading action on energy and climate links through the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate (MEF). This brings together the world's largest greenhouse gas emitters – including Australia – to develop plans to reduce emissions and increase use of clean energy. The MEF is one part of the

U.S. strategy to build support for a global agreement at Copenhagen. At Copenhagen, we have to secure agreement from both developed and developing economies on ways to decouple economic growth from rising emissions. Reducing emissions only in the developed world cannot stop climate change.

We are also leading the effort to provide economic and technological assistance to help developing countries adapt cleaner energy sources faster. We are funding a number of global technology funds to work with developing countries on energy. The U.S. either leads or is a key partner in seven separate international partnerships to expand the use of newer, cleaner energy sources. These range from clean coal technology to waste methane to hydrogen to fusion.

As I said before, the worst impacts of climate change will be felt in the poorest countries. We need to reduce emissions, but we also have to prepare for climate change that is already occurring. To do so, we are increasing to more than $312 million our funding for projects to help countries adapt, with a special focus on least-developed countries.

But a sustainable future is about more than climate change. Protecting and conserving the environment in the face of population growth, technological change, and global economic uncertainty is a challenge. But we have taken strong steps in the right direction. The U.S. has created the largest protected marine sanctuaries in the world. We led the process in February this year toward the development of

a new 140-country agreement to stop the release of mercury into the environment. We have a national law, the Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act, which requires us to work directly with the poorest nations to guarantee access to clean water and conservation of water supplies. In 2007, the United States committed over $1 billion to increase access to drinking water and sanitation, improve water resources management, and to enhance water productivity worldwide. We are now working in over 15 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa alone. As a result of these activities, more than 2 million people received access to safe drinking water for the first time.

We believe that economic growth must not focus solely on short-term profit but must also look to avoid long-term

disaster. We are one of the largest contributors to the Coral Triangle Initiative, committing more than $40 million so far. This effort will develop safe and sustainable ways to use sea resources while protecting the most versatile coral environment in the world.

All of these efforts are attempts to deploy "smart power" -- our generosity, ingenuity, expertise and willingness to learn to take on these challenges. You will find few sustainable development challenges that we are unwilling to try and help solve. Secretary Clinton said it best when she said "even if we disagree with some governments, America shares a bond of common humanity with the people of every nation, and we will work to invest in that common humanity."

Second, we recognize we need to adapt the way we live at home to reduce unsustainable practices globally. Keeping our own house in order is incredibly important when looking at a global development agenda.

Energy efficiency is one area where we know we can do better. The U.S. is committed to improving energy efficiency in our industry, in our offices and in our homes. The President has ordered the Department of Energy to issue tough new efficiency standards for gadgets and appliances like iPods, TVs, and the refrigerators and tea kettles you probably have in your dorm rooms. We are spending nearly $15 billion on energy efficiency improvements for low income families and state energy use

improvements, new green buildings and low-impact building technologies.

Our cars also must become more efficient. President Obama announced in May an alliance between government, manufacturers, and workers to dramatically raise our fuel efficiency. By 2016, the average fuel efficiency will be 35 miles per gallon (15 km/liter). This is four years faster than the previous target. Five years ago, if you were driving on the highways that surround Washington D.C. clogged with large SUVs, you might not believe we could ever set this goal. Our fuel import dependency has had a major impact on global development. President Obama said that our appetite for cheap imported oil comes at a price - "a price measured by our vulnerability to volatile oil markets, which

send gas prices soaring and families scrambling. It's measured by a trade deficit where as much as 20 percent of what we spend on imports is spent on oil. It's measured in billions of dollars sent to oil-exporting nations, many that we do not choose to support, if we had a choice."

We are striving to replace 20 percent of the gasoline we use with renewable fuels by 2017. The Environmental Protection Agency recently introduced draft rules to ensure that the biofuels we import to replace gasoline actually reduce greenhouse gas emissions, not increase them.

Congress has recently amended the Lacey Act, which puts criminal and civil penalties on those who trade in illegal

wildlife or plants to include forestry products. Forestry product importers have to prove that they come from sustainable sources. Timber products from illegal logging or rainforest destruction will now carry substantial legal risk if they are imported into the U.S. This is a powerful tool, as we are one of the largest markets for timber products.

Washington also works closely with states to improve agricultural sustainability. Protecting the soil and water are essential to our future food supplies. Progress has come on numerous fronts. The United States has reduced its use of toxic pesticides and herbicides by roughly 15 percent since the mid 1990s on key crops like corn, soybeans, and cotton. This has resulted in part from the adoption of new technology such as genetically enhanced seeds. This has also

had the benefit of increased profit margins to the farmers, which adds to the economic sustainability of the rural sector. In addition, the wide spread adoption of no-till farming, particularly in corn, soybeans, and cotton, has significantly reduced soil erosion. No-till farming has also improved water infiltration and sub-soil water retention, and reduced chemical runoff. This has improved the long-term sustainability America's subterranean water supplies, aquifers.

We are not alone in facing these issues. We work closely with like-minded countries, including Australia. We support Australia's efforts in developing cleaner technologies including by becoming a founding member of the Prime Minister's Global Carbon Capture and Storage Institute.

We also have a range of joint research programs on clean energy and climate sciences.

We are deeply concerned about the need to adapt to a changing climate. Our western states in particular are facing water shortages in the face of rapid growth that threaten our own agricultural sector and some of our fastest-growing cities. Climate change is projected to make the situation even worse. At the same time that we help developing countries develop water policy, we know we can learn from others. That is why we talk frequently with our counterparts here in Australia, and are looking for ways to expand our understanding of how your country is dealing with a drier future.

The U.S. can't accomplish all these goals alone, nor would we want to. We live in an interconnected world. The effects of poverty, war, and environmental collapse spill into our own streets. But we have a clear mission, and we have a direction to follow. It is my hope that you, as young people interested in global affairs, will share in the work needed to get there. There is plenty of work to be done.

[i] Inaugurated at age 47, President Obama is the fifth youngest president, behind Theodore Roosevelt (42), John F. Kennedy (43), Bill Clinton (46) and Ulysses S. Grant (46).